

# Home Rule at Stake on Housing Code Vote

(Editor's Note: Torrance voters will be asked at the April 9 municipal election to determine whether the city's Uniform Housing Code should be repealed. The measure was placed on the ballot after Active Citizens of Torrance gathered signatures of some 15 per cent of the city's registered voters. This is the first in a series of articles which the Press-Herald will publish on the subject.)

By NATALIE HALL  
Press-Herald Staff Writer  
City building and legal officials have scored the Active Citizens of Torrance (ACT) for "destroying home rule"

and, therefore, defeating their own purpose in advocating the abolition of the Uniform Housing Code.

Voters will be asked to decide April 9 whether the city should stick with the Uniform Housing Code or switch back to the state housing code.

ACT's avowed purpose in seeking the removal of the local code is to foil urban renewal projects, which they believe are linked to the current city code.

City Attorney Stanley Remelmeyer emphasized that key words needed to unlock federal urban renewal funds are "workable program." A city must have a workable program of housing code enforcement to qualify for the funds.

However, Remelmeyer underlined the fact that merely doing away with the Uniform Housing Code would not end the workable program in Torrance. Abolition of the code would mean that the California state housing code would go into effect immediately.

"The ACT people thought they could defeat urban renewal here in Torrance by pulling the rug out from under the city and eliminating the housing code," Remelmeyer exclaimed, "but they didn't do their homework!"

Remelmeyer stressed that the state code, when properly enforced, would serve to qualify the city for federal funds just as the city code does now.

The city attorney added

that the state code is virtually identical to the city code except that it is completely controlled from Sacramento. On the other hand, he said, local legislators have a great deal to say about the wording of the city's local Uniform Housing Code.

"ACT members are doing just the opposite of what they think they're doing," Remelmeyer went on. "They're destroying home rule."

Also critical of ACT's approach to the code controversy is Building and Safety Director Jack McKinnon, the man who will be most deeply affected by any change in code regulations.

"We've worked for years to develop our own local system," McKinnon stated, terminating the abolition of the Tor-

rance code a "step backwards."

Furthermore, McKinnon said, ACT people are defeating their own purpose in abolishing the code. "They claim to be against big government," he said, "but the effect of their move would be to handcuff me, making me turn to a supergovernment."

McKinnon underlined that with the state code, all wording, development, and revisions are done in Sacramento, and local municipalities have nothing to say about it. No changes may be made in the state code to make it fit the particular needs of a locality.

The building department director added as a sidelight the fact that the "workable

program" of housing code enforcement is required by the federal government to prevent current neighborhoods from becoming blighted. If the government is going to spend millions to clean up rundown neighborhoods, McKinnon said, it wants some assurance that present middle class area will not be allowed to degenerate.

The purpose of a housing code, therefore, is to maintain a decent neighborhood, not to correct a slum.

McKinnon also noted that ACT members oppose the invasion of privacy that may result from housing inspections. He underlined the fact that present regulations make it harder for an inspector to gain entrance than does the state code.

The city requires council approval as well as a court order obtained through the city government in order for an unwanted inspector to enter a home. The state requires only a court order obtained by the inspector.

However, McKinnon noted, his department has never yet had to resort to getting a court order.

California is one of the few states which has enacted minimum housing laws. "We're privileged to live in a state as farsighted as California is," McKinnon stated, adding that this state pioneered in the field of housing standards.

How different are the state and Uniform Housing Codes? McKinnon said the state code is patterned after Uniform (See CODE, Page A-3)

Torrance

## Press-Herald

Published semi-weekly Wednesday and Sunday by King Williams Press, Inc. Entered as second class matter January 30, 1914, at Post Office, Torrance, California, Under act of March 3, 1879

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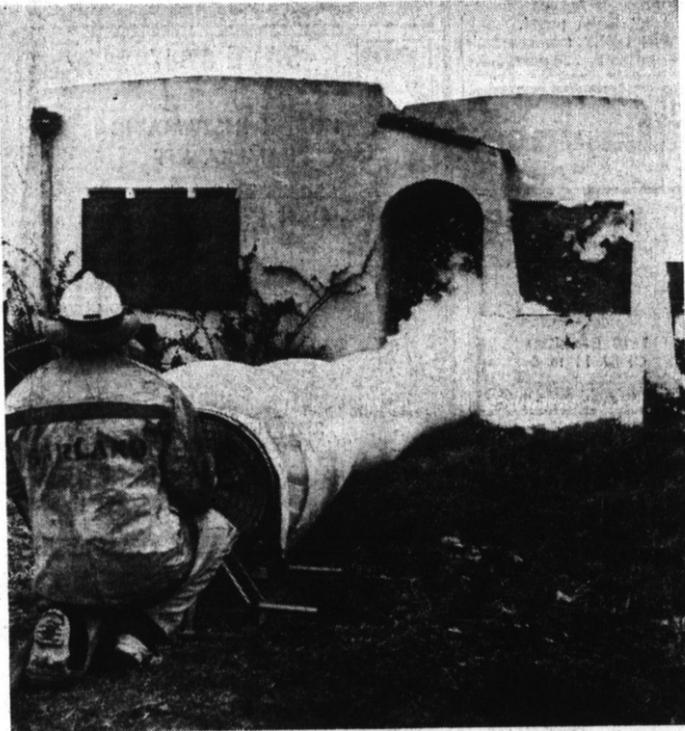
Series II, Volume IV, Number 70

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3238 Sepulveda Blvd., Torrance, California - Wednesday, February 28, 1968

By Carrier 50c Per Month  
By Mail, \$18 per Year

10c Per Copy 72 PAGES



**STRONGER THAN DIRT . . .** It's not early spring cleaning, but a test conducted Tuesday afternoon by the Torrance Fire Department. A crew from Station No. 2, under the direction of Deputy Chief B. C. Slonecker, is considering purchasing a foam machine to be used in fighting fires. The test was conducted on an empty dwelling in the Meadow Park Redevelopment area. This house was filled with fire-snuffing foam some 5 minutes after the test began. (Press-Herald Photo)

## Signal Sought for Normandie Crossing

Parents of children attending 223rd Street Elementary School literally took to the streets this week in their demands for traffic signals to be installed and in operation by April 1 at Normandie Avenue and Dunwich Street.

A crosswalk there has been the scene of one fatal accident—Feb. 1—and the crippling of another person two years ago—both of them crossing guards.

Added impetus to the drive was given Tuesday morning when a 6-year-old boy was struck by a car approximately

one block south of the crossing. He was not seriously hurt.

PARENTS have been protesting the lack of adequate protection for the children since Crossing Guard Betty Jo Walker was crippled June 7, 1965.

The campaign was a quiet one until Feb. 1 of this year when Crossing Guard Vernon Arnsdorf was fatally injured as he stepped off the curb to escort a group of children across.

Yesterday, little Clifford Wayne Gurrola, son of Felix and Maddie Gurrola of 1232 W. 226th St., Carson, was struck while crossing westbound on Normandie Avenue, 248 feet north of 225th Street, Harbor Division police said.

DRIVER of the vehicle, Kathy Yuuko Uyemura, 22, of 22128 S. Mariposa Ave., Torrance, told police she was northbound on Normandie at 30 mph about 7:40 a.m. when the boy cut in front of her. She was not cited, police said.

Witnessing the accident were parents who have been parading single file each direction across the nearby Dunwich Street crossing.

They began their protest march Monday morning and by Monday afternoon 75 parents were stopping traffic

several blocks in each direction.

Police arrived and told them not to block the intersection more than 30 seconds.

YESTERDAY afternoon an estimated 150 parents showed up for the vigil.

"We are doing everything we can and following the officers instructions so that we (See SIGNAL, Page A-3)

## New Snag in Proposed Sale of City Bus Line

### Report Sought On RTD Plan To Buy Buses

City Councilman Ross A. Sciarrotta Sr. has demanded a full explanation of why such a "big gap" exists between the contract price of city bus equipment and the actual replacement value.

Sciarrotta claims that the replacement value of city buses and other equipment is \$290,622. However, the city has contracted to sell this same stock for only \$110,000 to the Southern California Rapid Transit District.

Sciarrotta asked that city management officials look into the matter and offer an explanation.

COUNCILMAN Jay Beasley countered Sciarrotta by saying that the agreement with SCRTD was to sell the city's rolling stock for the book value.

The sale of the city's bus system has only one staunch opponent on the City Council. He is Mayor Albert Isen, who reminded councilmen last night that the city is getting \$110,000 from the Rapid Transit District for the buses. However, the city must then give them back a check for \$70,000 to cover the cost of subsidizing the bus system for one year.

The city is therefore selling its bus system for \$40,000, Isen said.

Councilman Ed Talbert expressed doubt that the bus sale would ever take place, due to the great number of stumbling blocks that clutter its path. He asked that figures be brought forth showing how much bus fares would have to be raised in order to eliminate the bus system's \$100,000 per year deficit.

IN FURTHER action, the local lawmakers voted to exchange city-owned property for county-owned property at the Torrance Civic Center.

The city will swap a parcel of land just north of the Superior Court Building for a parcel of comparable size fronting on Torrance Boulevard. The county-owned property is currently occupied by a building housing the Public Defender's office.

The parcel going to the county will be used for future expansion of court facilities and for parking needs which now exist.

The city plans to use the county parcel for construction of the proposed central library.



**LEAP YEAR BIRTHDAYS . . .** Enjoying birthday cake during a return visit to Torrance Memorial Hospital are two of the hospital leap-year babies. Barbara Thurber (seated at left) will celebrate her fourth birthday tomorrow, while Janet Sciarrotta will mark her second birthday. Barbara, who has been here for 16 years, is a student at Narbonne High School. Helping the two girls are their mothers, Mrs. Sonja Thurber (left), a nurse at the hospital, and Mrs. Ross Sciarrotta Jr. (Press-Herald Photo)

## They Were Born Feb. 29

Birthday usually are pretty special events.

And when they come on Feb. 29, they're really special events.

At least three Torrance residents who experience the thrill of birthdays less often than most people will get a chance to celebrate tomorrow.

Heading the list is a 10-year-old father of seven—Frank Vollmer of 18802 Cranbrook Ave. Five of those seven children are older than their father, who was born Feb. 29, 1928.

"We sort of forget him on off years," Mrs. Vollmer told the Press-Herald.

Another who will celebrate birthday tomorrow is Janet Sciarrotta, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Ross Sciarrotta Jr. Janet, a second grader at Madrona Elementary School, will observe her second birthday. She was born Feb. 29, 1960, at Torrance Memorial Hospital.

Completing the trio is Barbara Thurber, who was born Feb. 29, 1952, at Torrance Memorial Hospital. Barbara, a student at Narbonne High School, was one of seven leap-year babies born in the Torrance area in 1952.

## Crime Spree Aired in O'Brien Penalty Trial

By HENRY BURKE  
Press-Herald Staff Writer

At the penalty phase of the Jerry Lee O'Brien trial in Superior Court this week, witnesses testified to incidents which identified the defendant before and after the murder of Torrance Police Officer David Seibert.

O'Brien was convicted last Wednesday of the shotgun killing of Seibert Aug. 10 during a grocery market robbery at Crenshaw and Artesia boulevards.

The same jury which deliberated his conviction a week ago will rule on the penalty.

THE PROSECUTION, headed

by Deputy District Attorney Robert Burnett, brought to the witness stand W. G. Shepherd and Kenneth Crawford who provided records and testimony concerning a 13-day period in June when O'Brien was in custody at a forestry camp in Tulare County. O'Brien was reported missing on June 25.

Between then and his capture Aug. 25 he allegedly held up two market owners at gunpoint in North Hollywood and assaulted a family and service station operator in Low, Utah.

Mrs. Phyllis Peterson and two of her children, Kenna, 14, and Michael, 10, told of

their confrontation with O'Brien a few minutes before he sped from the station and crashed his car three miles away on Highway 40-50A.

O'Brien was taken into custody today after the crash.

DEFENSE Attorney Al Calof, in a cross examination of State Trooper Dan Chidester of Utah, had him identify bottles of narcotics allegedly found among the defendant's possessions.

Judge Burch Donahue recessed the trial yesterday at 2:45 p.m. and said additional witnesses are not available until Thursday. The trial will reconvene then.

## Airplane Crashes; Three Die

Three persons were killed Sunday evening when their light plane, headed for Torrance Municipal Airport, struck a power pole and crashed in Redondo Beach.

The crash, which occurred in dense fog, occurred in a new residential area just west of the Torrance city line.

The home of Redondo Beach policeman John R. Cotter was set on fire when gasoline sprayed the house. Four (See CRASH, Page A-3)

### Two Killed in Vietnam . . .

Soldiers from Torrance and Redondo Beach were listed on a casualty list released Tuesday by the Department of Defense. The Torrance soldier, Army WO Jeffrey Morley, whose wife, Linda, lives at 4718 Del Amo Blvd., was declared dead. He had been listed earlier as missing in action. Spec. 4 Robert J. Nardelli, 18, was accidentally killed while on a special mission in the vicinity of Dong Tam, Vietnam. He is the son of Mr. and Mrs. Victor Nardelli of 519 Blossom Lane, Redondo Beach. Reports said a bullet fired by an American soldier struck and killed Nardelli.

### Car, Train Collide . . .

A 38-year-old Palos Verdes Peninsula man escaped unhurt about 6:45 p.m. yesterday after his car collided with a slow-moving train at Crenshaw and Sepulveda boulevards. Yoji Hamawaki was driving south on Crenshaw Boulevard when the crash occurred. Frank Mayburry, 64, of Alhambra, was identified as the engineer. Police said the train was moving across Crenshaw Boulevard at 5 to 10 miles per hour.